"LIFE" - 19 April 1954

"A EUROPEAN YEAR OF DESTINY"

by Emmet John Hughes

- Excerpts -

To Adenauer and America the September election triumph meant more than a mirror to prosperity: Germany was now to be politically committed, heart and mind, to the West. Throughout this campaign der Alte had addressed his great rallies under the banner that read: "Denkt an Europa" ("Remember Europe"). He had scorned all cheap appeal to German nationalist sentiment. With a brave candor almost unique among modern European statesmen, he had repeatedly told his audiences to thank America for saving Germany from becoming a Soviet satellite. He had daringly allowed the Socialists to raise the cry for German unity, to murmur plausibly about negotiating with the Soviets, to warn that Germany's commitment to the European Defense Community could seal the division of Germany. In all these senses, he invited an effective mandate on the issue: which first-German unity or European unity? He behaved, in short, like a statesman of whom one of his close friends can truthfully say. "In his heart and thinking, he could just as well be a British foreign secretary or a French prime minister. He would act precisely the same, stand for exactly the same things. He is a European."

This soft-spoken man of single-minded purpose thus won the right to greet the events of last September with a rare burst of enthusiasm: "The elections have decided that Europe will come about, that the EDC will come about, and that the cold war is lost for Russia."

But could anything be so splendidly simple in the life of this continent or of Germany? Only three months later a less exhilarated chancellor was murmuring to an American, "There is wind in the air, and the sky is not without a clouds."

The fear that the most favorable combination of circumstances in a decade - or a generation - can be lost is the shape of the darkest cloud which Adenauer saw in the skies of his beloved Rhineland as the new year of 1954 began. In the anxious language of a friend, a confidant of "the old man" describes this moment in his life simply: "He knows his Germans. He knows so well how fragile their democracy still is. He knows there is none to take his place. He knows his own age. So to see the Germany of which he dreams firmly set on its course and the Europe in which he believes coming to real life -- is it any wonder that der Alte is a man in a hurry?"

Meanwhile "the old man" waits. Before him the question mark of time slowly grows vivid, edging on urgency. How many more months can pass before he hears the rumble of popular disillusion with all his grand talk of the Western alliance, the European community, the united Christian West?

How long can he restrain the restive factions within his own party by the verbal trick he has so often used -- the assurance of "confidential information" that France is about to act? How long will it be -- in this heartland of the continent open to the winds of West and East -- before the shape and meaning of the word "unity" change once again to signify not the unity of Europe but simply the unity of German?

Der Alte these days has little time for historic fancies. Problems of the moment press too close: to the west, the vacillation of France; to the East, a Soviet policy for the first time in years moving with dispatch and purpose. The mock "German" government of the Soviet zone can be ridiculed as a silly masquerade only by diplomats far enough away not to have to face the immediate problems it presents. But soon there may be "German" ambassadors from Soviet Germany accredited in capitals like Helsinki and New Delhi. Soon the "German Democratic Republic" can begin issuing with drumbeat monotony its series of appeals to Bonn to confer and discuss its brand of unity. And who knows? A bold enough Soviet policy might dare to propose recognition of the Bonn government itself while the Western powers favoring it still withhold its sovereignty.